

D'ANGELO FISHER



Contact Leo D'Angelo Fisher:
ldangelofisher@brw.fairfax.com.au

The selling proposition

● An information technology salesman entertained his lunch companions with the travails of trying to meet unrealistic sales targets. The lawyer at the table declared, "I could never be a salesman." The flogger of computers – or systems integration solutions, as his card prefers – would have none of it. "Anyone who has clients or customers is a salesman – including you," he challenged the lawyer.

The lawyer, who worked for a medium-sized city law firm, protested, trying not to sound like a snob as he sought to distance his noble and ancient profession from the journeyman occupation of selling. But the IT salesman – a former programmer with university and professional qualifications – prosecuted his case with vigour, arguing that lawyers had to pitch for business and drum up new clients. "That's selling," the techie closed. The lawyer admitted that some law firms monitored how much networking and prospecting their lawyers did, even hiring consultants to give lawyers the skill and confidence to work a room and get their business cards into as many hands as possible.

The word of mouth that once enabled accountants, lawyers, architects and other professional service providers to simply put out their shingle and wait for the business to roll in is no longer enough.

Rob Nixon, founder of Brisbane-based Nixon Advantage, a *BRW* Fast Starter company, helps accounting practice principals expand their businesses by taking them into the unfamiliar territory of marketing and business development.

Nixon is also chairman of 10X, a

company that sells business coaching franchises to accounting firms; so far he has signed up 60 firms.

Consulting firms as diverse as public relations, engineering and recruitment often find that professionals who become consultants on the basis of their technical skills are disappointed to find that their job also includes "business development". Cold calling and schmoozing does not come naturally to them and firms are increasingly turning to sales trainers to provide their reluctant professionals with selling skills.

In crowded markets, it's now necessary for professionals to acquire not only the ability to sell but also the willingness to do so routinely and diligently. The downside is a very unattractive culture in which everyone seems to be perpetually on the hustle. As well as learning how to sell, it's also important to know when and how to switch off.



Some law firms hire consultants to give their lawyers the skill and confidence to work a room of prospects